



Native American Sky Legends Teacher's Guide

Native American Sky Legends is a program designed to be used in conjunction with either astronomy studies or a social studies unit on Native Americans or an English lesson on storytelling. We hope this presentation can help to bridge the gap between such different study areas.

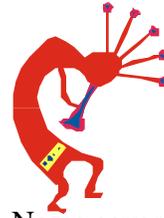
The show is a totally live presentation. It's content is completely constructed of stories from different American Indian tribes. Each story will explain some facet of astronomy or the sky as understood in Native mythology. Generally, scientific explanations for the phenomena discussed are not given within the presentation, but it is made clear that these are myths not scientific theories.

Legends told will vary with the seasons and the age level of the group. Story possibilities include: *How the stars came to be*, *tales of the Great Bear (the Big Dipper)*, *the Moon*, *northern lights*, *meteors*, *the rainbow* and perhaps a couple of constellation stories..

True or False

1. The Native Americans originally came from Asia. (T)
2. All Native Americans live in teepees. (F)
3. Many Native American groups viewed the big dipper as a bear. (T)
4. Legends were always told as being true. (Sometimes True, sometimes False)
5. Legends were often used to teach important lessons and values. (T)
6. Legends were originally written down in birch bark books. (F)
7. Many legends were told to explain things that were not easy to understand. (T)
8. The name "Indian" came from Columbus who named them that because he believed he had landed in the Indies--an island group off the coast of southeast Asia. (T)

Study Questions

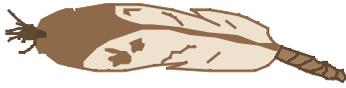


1. Who were the Native Americans?
2. Where did they come from? How did they get here?
3. What kinds of houses did the Native Americans traditionally live in? Name several different types of dwellings.
4. Why do you think animals were so very important to Native Americans? Why did animals figure so prominently in so many of their stories?
5. What sky objects would have been important to the Native Americans?
6. Why did the American Indians make up stories about the things they saw in the sky?
7. Where did the term “Indian” come from?
8. Why do you think many Native Americans do not like to be called “Indians”?
9. How were legends that are hundreds of years old stay alive without ever being written down?
10. What sort of lessons do you think the Native peoples learned from legends?

Project Ideas

1. Name as many different Native American tribes as you can. Then try to find where they lived on a map of North America.
2. Have each student (or groups of students) pick a tribe and research it. Where did they live? What types of dwellings did they live in? What kind of clothes did they wear? What kinds of food did they like? What type of government did they have? What were their religious beliefs?
3. Put up a bulletin board on Native Americans.
4. Read some Native American legends to the class.
5. Have the students make up their own sky legends.
6. Set up a diorama.
7. Make a list of foods that are of Native American origins. Gather together as many as possible and have a Native American feast!





Vocabulary



Bering Land Bridge: The land between Alaska and Siberia that was exposed due to heavy glaciation. This enabled the original Americans to migrate from Asia to the Americas. It is now submerged beneath the Bering Sea.

Constellations: Connect the dot pictures in the sky, using the stars as the dots.

Indian: This term arose from a misunderstanding when Columbus erroneously believed he was in the Indies (today called the East Indies in southeast Asia). It was only natural for him to name the people he met “Indians”.

Legend: A story that has been handed down orally over many generations. Such stories were often told as being true, but may or may not have been believed. It is common for such stories to have both human and animal characters; the characters might be mortal or immortal. They often have magical powers.

Meteors: Also called “*Shooting Stars*” or “*Falling Stars*”, meteors are not really stars at all. They are tiny rocks burning up in the atmosphere due to friction caused by their rubbing with the air. In space they are called “*Meteoroids*”; burning in the atmosphere they are called “*Meteors*”; and if they survive the journey to the ground, the rock left over is called a “*Meteorite*.”

Meteor Shower: This is when many meteors fall to Earth in a short period of time. The typical number might be 40 to 100 per hour.

Milky Way: A faint band of light that arches across the night sky. It is made of billions of stars. Native cultures sometimes referred to it as “*The Spirit Path*.”

Myth: A story similar to a legend, but often more serious in nature. They are often explanatory, the “How it Came to Be” type of story.

Nomadic: Refers to people who are constantly on the move as were some Native Americans.

Northern Lights: “*Aurora Borealis*” are flickering lights that appear in the northern sky. They are caused by disturbances on the Sun; the energy from these disturbances interacts with Earth’s upper atmosphere, causing it to glow.

Oral Tradition: This is how most legends arose. It means that these stories were never written down, they were kept alive through live story telling.

The Four-Leggeds: A Native American term for animals.

The People: This is what most Native American tribal names translate into. It’s what they historically called themselves.



Native American Sky Legends Word Search



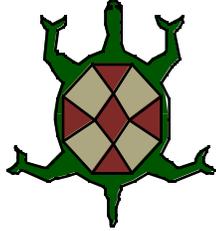
Find the vocabulary words hidden in the puzzle.
Good Luck !

P T C O N S T E L L A T I O N S E Z G G
A M U M T U N O R T H M R O O N T O R B
E O I S S T H A M L S W O G R R L Q E G
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Find these words and phrases hidden above:

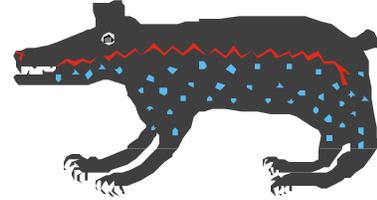
Animals Beaver constellations coyote east four leggeds fox frogs
Indians meteor milky way moon morning star north
northern lights rain sky legend sky south snake spider stars
sun the great bear the people west whiteman wigwam

Native American Legends Sampler



Three Stories

The Rainbow



(A Sioux myth adapted from *Legends of the Sioux*, a film by Charles W. Nauman for the South Dakota Department of Highways.)

A long time ago when the spirits walked the Earth, one of them was telling how he helped the winged creatures and the four-leggeds who are brothers and sisters of the Indians.

“I have made feathers for the birds to keep them warm and to flee their enemies and to dance before their mates,” the Spirit said.

“I gave the turtle his house, the muskrat his fur coat, and the bear his strong claws and keen nose. To the elk I have given antlers; to the bobcat I have given the color of trees. I have given strength to the mountain lion. I know of none that I have not helped.”

Just then a mother deer look up. “You have given me to run like the wind,” she said, “but how will the fawn be saved from the sharp teeth of the coyote?”

“I will help you,” the Spirit said. He took his brush and painted and colored the fawn with spots of sunlight and ever since the fawn can hide safely in the leaves and shadows.

In the bright days of summer the flowers danced above the grass like a carpet of sparkling jewels. Great was their gift of pleasure to the runners who carried news from village to village. Happy were the feet of the maidens and joyful were the winged ones (birds) of the air dancing among the blossoms. But the flowers were bowed in sadness.

The Great Spirit was puzzled and he listened.

“Where will we go when the white giant (snow) comes from the north and we all must die?” the flowers were saying. “We too make the Earth good to look upon. Should we not go to a Happy Hunting Ground of our own?”

The Spirit nodded his head smiling. So now after the rain clouds of summer you may see the lovely flowers of last year arching across the heavens in a rainbow. That is how the rainbow came to be.

The Morning Star and the Northern Lights

(Adapted from a Wabanaki myth from Mark Littman's *The People*.)

Old chief Morning Star had only one son. Young Morning Star took a strange path northward. This path crossed high over the sky. It was the spirit's path--the Milky Way. When the old chief set foot upon the sacred path, suddenly he could not see or hear. When he opened his eyes, he was in a land of strange glowing lights. There the people all were wearing belts of a rainbow light and colored lights upon their heads. All through the night they played a game with a ball made of changing colors.

As the old chief watched the players of the north dodge and leap and chase the ball, he saw his son, Young Morning Star, foremost among the players. He was wearing the most vivid colors.

When the game was over, Young Morning Star went home with his father and all his people were glad because Morning Star was with them again--brightening the colored skies of dawn.

And when Morning Star cannot be seen, the people know that he is in the northern land of color. So when the special game with the lights is played, and the *Northern Lights* leap and dance about the sky, the people know that Morning Star lives on and will return.

The Milky Way

(Adapted from an Algonquin myth from Mark Littman's *The People*)

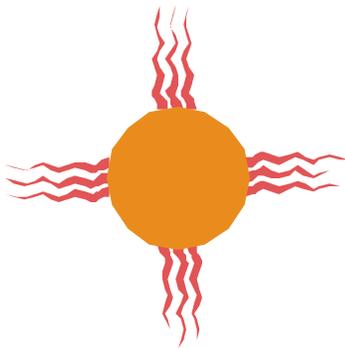
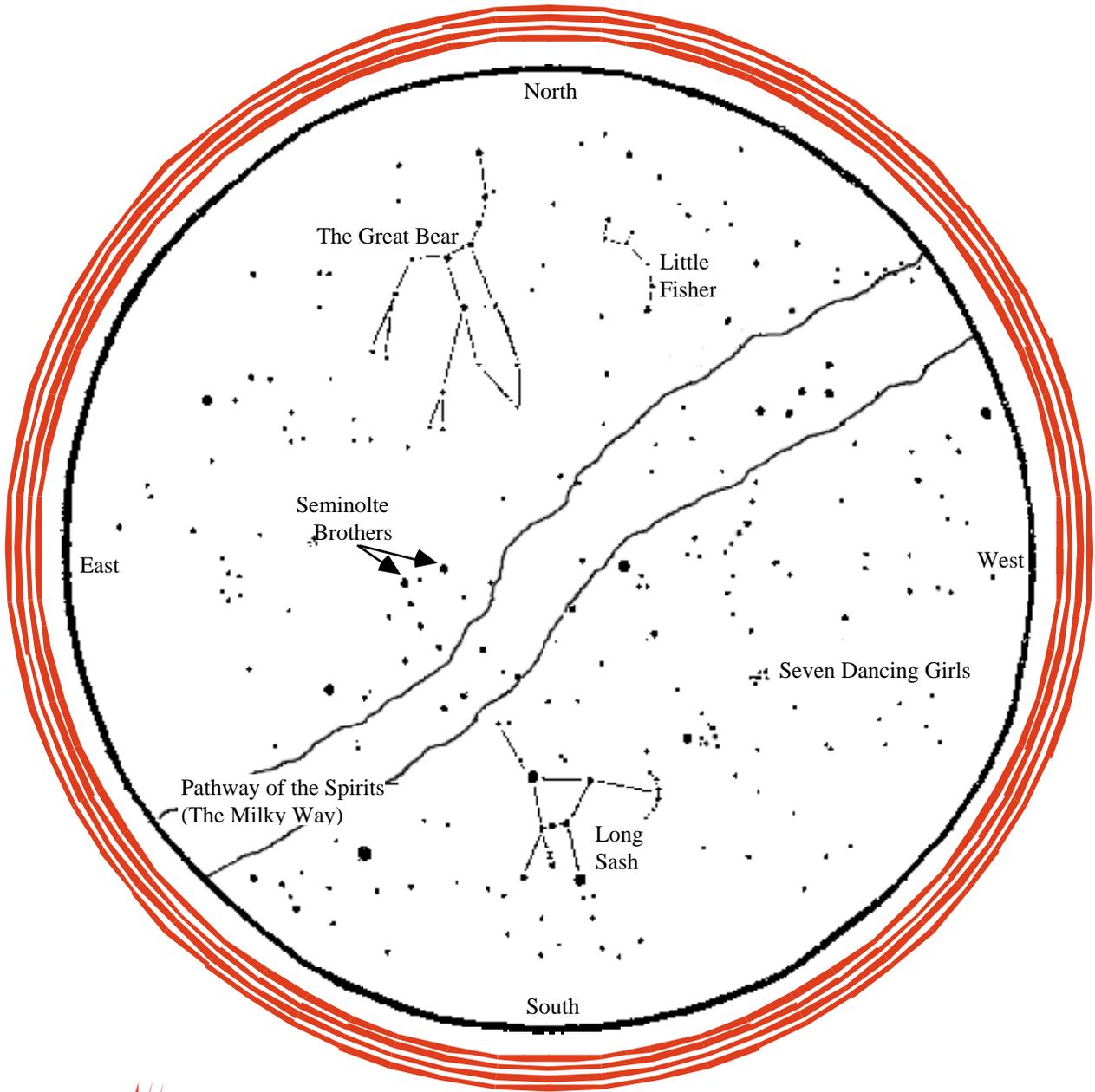


And late at night, as the coals of the fire deepen into black, we tell of our great souls. Silent were their footsteps through the pine forests, across buffalo grass, and into the canyons. Steadfast in their teachings, with their lives they blazed a trail for our people to follow with honor.

And when their footsteps brought them to that chasm beyond which men venture only once, they vanished from our midst. It is likely that we shall never see their equal again.

But as they left their work and spirit forever with us, their people, so even now as they journey on, they leave an imperishable mark upon the sky. For there, arching across the heavens is the pathway of the souls.

We do not know where their journey now leads them. Nor do we know what sights they may behold. And in the night each bright star is a campfire blazing in the sky where they have paused in their journey to look down on us, their people, as we huddle for warmth around the campfire.



A Native American Sky Chart 45° North Latitude



Create a Living Story

This is similar to the old party game where everyone adds one sentence to the previous person's sentence and makes up a story as it goes along. In this case, we want you to prepare the children a bit first by introducing the main characters of the story, then they can supply the action.

MATERIALS NEEDED: Tape recorder

PROCEDURE:

This activity will take one week to complete. Beginning on Monday, it will finish on Friday.

Tell the children that long, long ago, people didn't have television or radio or movies or even books. What did people do for entertainment? You will get many answers such as dancing, singing, and storytelling. Tell them that today we are still interested in storytelling. (Make it clear that we are interested in stories that people simply tell rather than book stories.) Ask the children where people told these stories. Inevitably, someone will say in a circle around a campfire. Have the kids move their desks out of the center of the room. Clear a large spot and have them sit in a big circle. You might even pull the window blinds to darken the room to be like night time.

Now you should introduce the characters of the story. The characters will all be from constellations in the sky. Two lists are included, one of classical Greek constellations and one of Native American constellations. Don't feel that your class's story needs to use all of them. Too many characters in one story gets confusing. (One suggestion is to start out with three characters, let the story begin and make one full trip around the circle. When it gets back to you, you can introduce a new character from the sky.) You will be giving the kids the characters, but the kids will create the story's action. It can go on as long as you feel appropriate; however, don't make the story longer than your kids can remember. They will be asked to repeat the same story each day for the rest of the week. Use the tape recorder to record the first version of the story told on Monday then again on Friday.

(Continued on the next page...)

(Create a Living Story Activity Continued . . .)

CHARACTERS:

TRADITIONAL GREEK CONSTELLATIONS:

Andromeda	A princess	
Cassiopeia	A queen	
Cetus	A sea monster	
The Big Dog	Orion's hunting dog	
The Little Dog	Orion's other hunting dog	
Leo	A lion	
Lepus	A rabbit	
Orion	A great hunter	
Perseus	A hero	
Pleiades	Seven beautiful sisters who like to dance	
Taurus	A bull	

NATIVE CONSTELLATIONS:

Long Sash	A Hero/Hunter (Orion)
Seven Dancing Girls	(Pleiades)
Great Bear	(Big Dipper or Ursa Major)
Little Fisher	(Little Dipper or Ursa Minor)
The Spirit Path	(The Milky Way)
The Place of Decision	(The two stars Castor and Pollux)

CONCLUSION:

Tell your students to go home and share the story with someone in their family. Each day, have them sit in the circle again and try to retell the story they created. Repeat this until Friday. The general story line should stay about the same, but the details will grow and change. After their telling on Friday, have them listen to the first version of the story you recorded on Monday. Which one is better? Is it the same story? Which is more interesting? They should be able to see how stories change with repeated tellings. They will also love hearing themselves on tape. They will have created a living story.

Storytelling Bibliography¹

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Audio Tapes

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PLEASE NOTE: Please pre-read any stories before presenting them to your students. Many of these books are adult books and not all stories are appropriate for children.

